

Nine verses made upon an ecstasy of high contemplation

St John of the Cross 1542-1591

Entréme donde no supe
y quedéme no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

Yo no supe dónde entraba,
pero, cuando allí me vi,
sin saber dónde me estaba,
grandes cosas entendi;
no diré lo que senti,
que me quedé no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

De paz y de piedad
era la ciencia perfecta,
en profunda soledad,
entendida vía recta;
era cosa tan secreta,
que me quedé balbuciendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

Estaba tan embebido,
tan absorto y ajenado,
que se quedó mi sentido
de todo sentir privado;
y el espíritu dotado
de un entender no entendiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

El que allí llega de vero,
de sí mismo desfallece;
cuanto sabía primero
mucho bajo le paresce;
y su ciencia tanto cresce,
que se queda no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

Cuanto más alto se sube,
tanto menos entendía
que se la tenebrosa nube
que a la noche esclarecía;
por eso quien la sabía
queda siempre no sabiendo
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

I entered in, not knowing where,
And there remained uncomprehending,
All knowlledge transcending.

I entered - where - I did not know,
Yet when I found that I was there,
Though where I was I did not know,
Profound and subtle things I learned;
Nor can I say what I discerned,
For I remained uncomprehending,
All knowledge transcending.

Of peace and holy truth
It was knowledge to perfection,
Within the depths of solitude
The narrow path of wisdom;
A secret so profoundly hidden
That I was left there stammering,
All knowledge transcending.

I was so caught up and rapt away,
In such oblivion immersed,
That every sense and feeling lay
Of sense and feeling dispossessed;
And so my mind and soul were blessed
To undrstand not understanding,
All knowledge transcending.

The one who truly reaches there
No longer in himself remains,
And all that he had known at first
Seems base and mean to him, and wanes;
So great a knowledge then he gains
That he is left uncomprehending,
All knowledge transcending.

His understanding is the less endowed -
The more he climbs to greater heights -
To understand the shadowed cloud
Which there illuminates the night;
Thus he who comprehends his sight
Will alway stay not understanding,
All knowledge transcending.

Este saber no sabiendo
es de tan alto poder,
que los sabios arguyendo
jamás le pueden vencer;
que no llega su saber
a no entender entendiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

Y es de tan alta excelencia
aqueste sumo saber,
que no hay facultad ni ciencia
que le puedan emprender;
quien se supiere vencer
con un no saber sabiendo,
irá siempre trascendiendo.

Y si lo queréis oír,
consiste esta suma ciencia
en un subido sentir
de la divinal Esencia;
es obra de su clemencia
hacer quedar no entendiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

San Juan de la Cruz

I entered into unknowing,
and there I remained unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

I entered into unknowing,
yet when I saw myself there,
without knowing where I was,
I understood great things;
I will not say what I felt
for I remained in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

That perfect knowledge
was of peace and holiness
held at no remove
in profound solitude;
it was something so secret
that I was left stammering,
transcending all knowledge.

I was so 'whelmed,
so absorbed and withdrawn,
that my senses were left
deprived of all their sensing,
and my spirit was given
an understanding while not understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

This knowledge through uncomprehending
Is of such supreme dominion
That by learned men contending
It is never grasped or won;
Their learning never lights upon
The knowledge of unknowing,
Beyond all knowledge going.

And that exalted wisdom
Is of such a high degree,
It can be undertaken
By no art or faculty;
Who knows the way to mastery
By a knowledge that unknowns
Transcending ever goes.

And if you wish to hear,
This highest knowledge is conceived
In a sense, sublime and clear
Of the essence of the Deity;
It is an act of His great Clemency
That keeps us there uncomprehending,
All knowledge transcending.

tr: Gerald Brennan

I came into the unknown
and stayed there unknowing
rising beyond all science.

I did not know the door
but when I found the way
unknowing where I was
I learned enormous things
but what I felt I cannot say
for I remained unknowing
rising beyond all science.

It was the perfect realm
of holiness and peace
In deepest solitude
I found the narrow way;
a secret giving such release
that I was stunned and stammering
rising beyond all science.

I was so far inside
so dazed and far away
my senses were released
from feelings of my own.
My mind had found a surer way;
a knowledge by unknowing
rising beyond science.

He who truly arrives there
cuts free from himself;
all that he knew before
now seems worthless,
and his knowledge so soars
that he is left in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

The higher he ascends
the less he understands,
because the cloud is dark
which lit up the night;
whoever knows this
remains always in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

This knowledge in unknowing
is so overwhelming
that wise men disputing
can never overthrow it,
for their knowledge does not reach
to the understanding of not understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

And this supreme knowledge
is so exalted
that no power of man or learning
can grasp it;
he who masters himself
will, with knowledge in unknowing, always be
transcending.

And if you should want to hear:
this highest knowledge lies
in the loftiest sense
of the essence of God;
this is a work of his mercy,
to leave one without understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

tr: Austrian Province ... Teresian Carmel

I enter'd in - I knew not where -
And, there remaining, knew no more,
Transcending far all human lore.

I knew not where I enter'd in.
'Twas giv'n me there myself to see
And wondrous things I learn'd within,
Yet knew I not where I could be,
I'll say not what was told to me:
Remaining there, I knew no more,
Transcending far all human lore.

And he who does arrive
collapses as in sleep
for all he knew before
now seems a lowly thing
and so his knowledge grows so deep
that he remains unknowing
rising beyond all science.

The higher he ascends
the darker is the wood;
it is the shadowy cloud
that clarified the night
and so the one who understood
remains always unknowing
rising beyond all science.

This knowledge by unknowing
is such a soaring force
that scholars argue long
but never leave the ground
Their knowledge always fails the source
to understand unknowing
rising beyond all science.

This knowledge is supreme
crossing a blazing height;
though formal reason tries
it crumbles in the dark,
but one who would control the night
by knowledge of unknowing
will rise beyond all science.

And if you wish to hear:
the highest science leads
to an ecstatic feeling
of the most holy Being;
and from his mercy comes his deed:
to let us stay unknowing
rising beyond all science.

tr: Willis Barnstone 1968

I entered no knowing where,
And I remained no knowing,
Beyond all science knowing.
I do not know where I entered,
But when I saw myself there,
Not knowing where I entered,
Many things I suddenly learned;
I will not say what these things were,
For I remained not knowing,
Beyond all science knowing.

That was the love, all else above,
 Of perfect peace, devotion deep.
 In the profoundest retreat of love
 The path direct I learn'd to keep.
 Such secret knowledge did I reap
 That, stammering, I could speak no more,
 Transcending far all human lore.
 Herein so deeply was I vers'd,
 Thoroughly absorb'd and borne so high,
 So far my senses were immers'd
 That destitute of sense was I.
 My soul was dower'd from on high
 With power of thought that thought no more,
 Transcending far all human lore.
 He that in truth attains to this
 Is lost to self upon the earth.
 All that, before, he knew as his
 Appears to him of little worth.
 His knowledge comes anew to birth,
 Yet, resting there, he knows no more,
 Transcending far all human lore.
 The nearer I approach'd the cloud,
 The less I understood its light,
 That, howso darksome was its shroud,
 Illumin'd all the gloomy night.
 Wherefore a soul that knows that sight
 Can never compass knowledge more,
 For this transcends all human lore.
 This wond'rous knowledge knowing naught
 Is of a power so sov'reign high
 That wise men's reasoning and thought
 Defeat it not, howe'er they try.
 Ne'er can their intellect come nigh
 This power of thought that thinks no more,
 Transcending far all human lore.
 Built on so excellent a plan
 This summit of true knowledge is
 That neither wit nor power of man
 Can ever reach such heights of bliss.
 He that can climb as high as this
 Through knowledge that can know no more
 Shall aye transcend all human lore.

It was peace, it was love,
 It was the perfect knowledge,
 In deep loneliness
 I saw with wisdom;
 It was a thing so secret
 I was left babbling and trembling,
 Beyond all science knowing.
 I was so far beyond,
 So lost and absorbed,
 I lost all my senses
 I was of all sensing dispossessed;
 And my spirit was filled
 With knowledge not knowing,
 Beyond all science knowing.
 Whoever truly reaches there,
 To himself he is lost;
 All he knew before
 Now appears very base;
 But his knowledge grows,
 And he remains not knowing,
 Beyond all science knowing.
 The higher he climbs,
 The less he understands,
 For this is the dark cloud
 That brings light to the night;
 And whoever has this light
 Always remains not knowing,
 Beyond all science knowing.
 This knowing by not knowing,
 Is of such high power,
 That the arguments of the wise
 Are unable to grasp it;
 For their knowledge does not explain
 Not to know knowing,
 Beyond all science knowing.
 And this exalted wisdom
 Is of such excellence,
 That no faculty or science
 Can hope to reach it;
 But he who learns to conquer himself
 With this knowledge of not knowing,
 Will always go beyond all science knowing.

Would ye unto this summit climb?
Then know wherein its nature lies,
'Tis an experience all-sublime,
God's Self reveal'd before our eyes.
His clemency the means supplies
Whereby man understands no more,
Yet far transcends all human lore.

tr: nk

I entered in, I know not where,
And I remained, though knowing naught,
Transcending knowledge with my thought.
Of when I entered I know naught,
But when I saw that I was there
(Though where it was I did not care)
Strange things I learned, with greatness fraught,
Yet what I heard I'll not declare,
But there I stayed, though knowing naught,
Transcending knowledge with my thought.
Of peace and piety interwound
This perfect science had been wrought,
Within the solitude profound
A straight and narrow path it taught,
Such secret wisdom there I found
That there I stammered, saying naught,
But topped all knowledge with my thought.
So borne aloft, so drunken-reeling,
So rapt was I, so swept away,
Within the scope of sense or feeling
My sense or feeling could not stay.
And in my soul I felt, revealing,
A sense that, though its sense was naught,
Transcended knowledge with my thought.
The man who truly these has come
Of his own self must shed the guise;
Of all he knew before the sum
Seems far beneath that wondrous prize;
And in this lore he grows so wise
That he remains, though knowing naught,
Transcending knowledge with his thought.
The farther that I climbed the height
The less I seemed to understand
The cloud so tenebrous and grand
That there illuminates the night.
For he who understand that sight
Remains for aye, though knowing naught,
Transcending knowledge with his thought.

And if you want to hear it,
This highest science consists
In a most sublime sensing
Of the Divine Essence;
It is an act of clemency
Which leaves us not knowing,
Beyond all science knowing.

tr: Antonio T de Nicolas

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And, there remaining, knew no more,
Transcending far all human lore.
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'Twas giv'n me there myself to see
And wondrous things I learn'd within,
Yet knew I not where I could be,
I tell not what was shown to me:
Remaining there, I knew no more,
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Of perfect peace, devotion deep.
In that profound retreat of love
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The less I understood its light,
That, howso darksome was its shroud,
Illumin'd all the gloomy night.
Wherefore a soul that knows that sight
Can never compass knowledge more,
For this transcends all human lore.

This wisdom without understanding
Is of so absolute a force
No wise man of whatever standing
Can ever stand against its course,
Unless they tap its wondrous source,
To know so much, though knowing naught,
They pass all knowledge with their thought.

This summit all so steeply towers
And is of excellence so high
No human faculties or powers
Can ever to the top come nigh.
Whoever with its steep could vie,
Though knowing nothing, would transcend
All thought, forever, without end.

If you would ask, what is its essence -
This summit of all sense and knowing:
It coimes from the Divinest Presence -
The sudden sense of Him outflowing,
In His great clemency bestowing
The gift that lreaves men knpowing naught,
Yet passing knowledge with their thought.

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Is of a power so sov'reign high
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Defeat it not, howe'er they try.
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Then know wherein its nature lies,
'Tis an experience all-sublime,
God's Self reveal'd before our eyes.
His grace alone the means supplies
Whereby man understands no more,
Yet far transcends all human lore.